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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000490

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER DAVIZ SIMANGO: A STRATEGIC THINKER

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Todd C. Chapman, Reasons 1.4(b+d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On April 12, Charge and P/E Chief met with leader of the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM) Daviz Simango to discuss his recent trip to Portugal, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, as well as his future plans in this election year. As Simango develops his political platform, his immediate need is for additional funding to support a national campaign, electoral observers, an independent radio station, and his personal security. Simango cast new light on the self-destruction of opposition party RENAMO, the Electoral Observer body (OE), FRELIMO's perception of Simango as a threat, politically-motivated arrests, reductions in media freedom, and a strategic plan for the coming year. END SUMMARY.

SIMANGO BRIEFS ON HIS EUROPEAN TOUR

12. (C) On Easter Sunday, Daviz Simango met with the Charge and P/E Chief at the Charge's residence for 90 minutes to discuss his recent trip to Europe. He was accompanied by two current RENAMO congressmen Ismael Mussa and Agostinho Ussore, who had also accompanied him on the trip. Visiting Portugal, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, he met with both ruling and opposition parties in each country as well as the Mozambican diaspora. Simango visited Europe to seek funding for his new MDM party as it prepares to contest the Presidential, National Assembly, and Provincial Council elections in late 2009. Focused on funding, Simango opined that he will need at least 20,000 observers from his party to cover all the country's polling stations on election day to promote the integrity of election results.

FRELIMO HEAVY HANDED ON DEMOCRACY ISSUES

13. (C) With media freedom increasingly under pressure from the Government of Mozambique (GRM) and the ruling-FRELIMO party, Simango said that he wishes to purchase an independent radio station in order to get his message out during the campaign season, estimating the cost to be between \$80,000 and \$90,000. Simango appears concerned about rumors that independent paper Zambeze was under pressure by the GRM to close its doors or rein-in its reporting. STV/Soico, the country's most successful private print and TV media outlet, also appears to have been recently co-opted by new investors affiliated with FRELIMO who wish to tone down the outlet's criticism of the GRM, according to Simango.

14. (C) Describing FRELIMO, Simango suggests that the ruling party feels threatened and will likely try and push him out of the electoral process. While FRELIMO realizes the danger of a democratic system without opposition politics, Simango believes that FRELIMO feels more threatened by his presence on the political scene than the reaction from the donor community should the ruling party stamp-out opposition party politics, as nearly accomplished in the recent municipal elections. Simango believes that FRELIMO has little interest in democracy and good governance, citing recent aggressive moves against the media, state dominance of the electoral commission, and the arrest of 14 MDM party members in the past few weeks, including the death of one member while in custody. (Note: This is the first such report of this incident, otherwise unreported in the media.) The Charge informed Simango that he was already aware from multiple sources that their earlier meetings both in Beira and Maputo were already of great concern to FRELIMO. Nevertheless, the Charge continued, such meetings would be continued with MDM and other political parties, including FRELIMO, throughout the electoral period to demonstrate USG interest in a competitive democratic process.

MDM ALREADY HAS BROAD-BASED SUPPORT

15. (C) Simango explained that his support in the country is

fairly broad-based. In a recent private meeting, several former Ministers from previous FRELIMO administrations met with Simango to voice their support for his candidacy, though noting their inability to do so publicly. (Note: Former Foreign Minister under President Chissano Leonardo Simao told Charge that while tensions certainly exist between the Chissano and Guebuza factions within the FRELIMO party, he did not anticipate widespread defections to MDM. End Note).

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Most RENAMO senior party members and intellectuals have left for MDM, leading Simango to describe the former opposition party as being in self-destruct mode. As an example, Simango explained that there are no longer any RENAMO representatives in Cabo Delgado Province--they've all moved to MDM. RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama's recent criticisms of Catholic and Muslim leaders for perceived slights against RENAMO has further eroded RENAMO's base with traditionally supportive religious groups.

16. (C) Currently, Simango is developing the details of the MDM platform, which he described to the Charge in general terms as centrist and pro-private sector. His platform will undoubtedly cause consternation in FRELIMO ranks with its broad appeal to foreign audiences. When questioned about his own personal security, Simango related that there had already been one attempt on his life in Beira by a disgruntled RENAMO party member, and he pointed to examples of other Mozambican political activists who had died in suspicious circumstances. While the MDM leader's personal security remains weak, and he is aware of a need to improve it, he lacks the funds.

COMMENT: SIMANGO'S STRATEGIC OPPOSITION

17. (C) Though only recently established, MDM represents the sole viable opposition force in a political landscape increasingly dominated by the ruling party. As in previous meetings, Simango continues to impress, not with an overwhelming charismatic personality but rather with his understanding of the methodical steps required to build a national party and campaign. He is a strategic thinker whose plans are limited only by a lack of cash. He sounds like a campaign manager when talking about targeting segments of the population, such as university students, religious communities, disaffected FRELIMO supporters and the large numbers who did not vote in the last Presidential election. Simango is unpretentious, relaxed in conversation, and fueled by what appears to be a genuine civic purpose. He freely allowed his lieutenants at the meeting to participate in the discussion, something not often seen with senior political leaders here. Some FRELIMO insiders fear that Simango is motivated by vengeance against FRELIMO oldtimers who are implicated in the murder of Davis Simango's father Uria Simango, a former FRELIMO party president who was edged out during a party struggle in 1970.

18. (C) The personal security of Simango is a concern, as he continues to surprise FRELIMO with his bold steps towards a Presidential candidacy (not yet formally declared, but understood) and his lucid strategic thinking. Some disgruntled members of RENAMO may also act on their wishes to see him depart the political scene. The Charge recently shared his concerns about Simango's personal security with a senior advisor to President Guebuza, noting that any physical harm to Simango, whether perpetrated by RENAMO or FRELIMO radicals, would have immediate negative repercussions. The advisor assured that Guebuza had given instructions to the FRELIMO Policial Committee that nothing untoward should happen to MDM's leaders or supporters. As MDM and Simango grow in popularity, FRELIMO is faced with a new challenge, and some in FRELIMO are becoming increasingly nervous.

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